

A
LETTER

TO A
DISSENTER,

Upon occasion of
HIS MAJESTIES

Late Gracious

Declaration

OF
INDULGENCE.



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LETTER

REGISTERED

W. & M. A. STILES

GRAND

ENCLOSURE

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A

L E T T E R

T O A

Dissenter, &c.

S I R,

Since Addresses are in fashion, give me leave to make one to you. This is neither the Effect of Fear, Interest, or Resentment; therefore you may be sure it is sincere: and for that reason it may expect to be kindly received. Whether it will have power enough to Convince, dependeth upon the Reasons, of which you are to judge; and upon your preparation of Mind, to be perswaded by Truth, whenever it appeareth to you. It ought not to be the less welcom, for coming from a friendly hand, one whose kindness to you is not lessened by difference of Opinion, and who will not let his thoughts for the Publick be so tyed or confined to this or that Sub-division of Protestants, as to stifle the Charity, which besides all other Arguments, is at this time become necessary to preserve us.

I am neither surprized nor provoked, to see that in the condition you were put into by the Laws, and the ill circumstances you lay under, by having the Exclusion and Rebellion laid to your Charge, you were desirous to make your selves less uneasie and obnoxious to Authority. Men who are sore, run to the nearest Remedy with too much haste, to consider all the consequences: Grains of allowance are to be given, where Nature giveth such strong Influences. When to men under Sufferings it offereth Ease, the present Pain will hardly allow time to examine the Remedies; and the strongest Reason can hardly gain a fair Audience from our Mind, whilst so possessed, till the smart is a little allayed.

I do not know whether the Warnith that naturally belongeth to new Friendships, may not make it a harder Task for me to perswade you. It is like telling Lovers, in the beginning of their Joys, that they will in a little time have an end. Such an unwelcome Style doth not easily find credit: but I will suppose you are not so far gone in your new Passior, but that you will hear still; and therefore I am under the less discouragement, when I offer to your consideration two things. The first is, the

cause you have to suspect your new Friends. The *second*, the Duty incumbent upon you, in Christianity and Prudence, not to hazard the Publick Safety, neither by desire of Ease, nor of Revenge.

To the *first*: Consider that notwithstanding the smooth Language which is now put on to engage you, these new Friends did not make you their Choice, but their Refuge: They have ever made their first Courtships to the Church of *England*, and when they were rejected there, they made their Application to you in the second place. The Instances of this, might be given in all times. I do not repeat them, because whatsoever is unnecessary, must be tedious, the truth of this Assertion being so plain, as not to admit a Dispute. You cannot therefore reasonably flatter your selves, that there is any Inclination to you. They never pretended to allow you any Quarter, but to usher in Liberty for themselves under that shelter. I refer you to Mr. *Coleman's Letters*, and to the *Journals of Parliament*, where you may be convinced, if you can be so mistaken, as to doubt; nay, at this very hour, they can hardly forbear, in the height of their Courtship, to let fall hard words of you. So little is Nature to be restrained; it will start out sometimes, disdaining to submit to the Usurpation of Art and Interest.

This Alliance, between *Liberty* and *Infallibility*, is bringing together the Two most contrary things that are in the World. The Church of *Rome* doth not onely dislike the allowing Liberty, but by its Principles it cannot do it. Wine is not more expressly forbidden to the *Mahometans*, then giving Hereticks Liberty is to *Papists*: They are no more able to make good their Vows to you, then Men married before, and their Wife alive, can confirm their Contract with another. The continuance of their kindness, would be a habit of Sin, of which they are to repent, and their Absolution is to be had upon no other terms, than their Promise to destroy you. You are therefore to be hugged now, onely that you may be the better squeezed at another time. There must be something Extraordinary, when the Church of *Rome* setteth up Bills, and offereth Plaisters, for tender Consciences; By all that hath hitherto appeared, her skill in Chirurgery lyeth chiefly in a quick Hand, to cut off Limbs; but she is the worst at Healing, of any that ever pretended to it.

To come so quick from another extrem, is such an unnatural motion, that you ought to be upon your Guard; the other day you were *Sons of Belial*, Now, you are *Angels of Light*. This is a violent change, and it will be fit for you to pause upon it, before you believe it: If your features are not altered, neither is their Opinion of you, whatever may be pretended. Do you believe less than you did, that there is Idolatry in the Church of *Rome*? sure you do not. See then, how they treat both in Words and Writing, those who entertain that Opinion. Conclude from hence, how inconsistent their favour is with this single Article, except they give you a Dispensation for this too, and

and by a *Non Obstante*, secure you that they will not think the worse of you.

Think a little how dangerous it is to build upon a Foundation of Paradoxes. Popery now is the only friend to Liberty, and the known enemy to Persecution: The men of *Taunton* and *Tiverton*, are above all other eminent for Loyalty. The *Quakers* from being declared by the Papists not to be Christians, are now made Favourites, and taken into their particular Protection; they are on a sudden grown the most Accomplished men of the Kingdom, in good Breeding, and give Thanks with the best Grace, in double refined Language. So that I should not wonder, though a man of that Perswasion, in spite of his Hat, should be Master of the Ceremonies. Not to say harsher words, these are such very new things, that it is impossible not to suspend our belief, till by a little more Experience we may be inform'd whether they are Realities or Apparitions: We have been under shameful mistakes, if these Opinions are true; but for the present, we are apt to be incredulous; except we could be convinced, that the Priests words in this Case too, are able to make such a sudden, and effectual change; and that their Power is not limited to the Sacrament, but that it extendeth to alter the nature of all other things, as often as they are so disposed.

Let me now speak of the Instruments of your Friendship, and then leave you to judge, whether they do not afford matter of Suspicion. No Sharpness is to be mingled where Healing only is intended; so nothing will be said to expose particular men, how strong soever the Temptation may be, or how clear the Proofs to make it out. A word or two in general, for your better caution, shall suffice: Suppose then, for Argument's sake, that the Mediators of this new Alliance, should be such as have been formerly employed in Treaties of the same kind, and there detected to have Acted by Order, and to have been Impowered to give Encouragements and Rewards. Would not this be an Argument to suspect them?

If they should plainly be under Engagements to one side, their Arguments to the other, ought to be received accordingly; their fair Pretences are to be looked upon as part of their Commission, which may not improbably give them a Dispensation in the case of Truth, when it may bring a prejudice upon the Service of those by whom they are employed.

If there should be men who having formerly had Means and Authority to persuade by Secular Arguments, have in pursuance of that Power, sprinkled Money amongst the Dissenting Ministers; and if those very men should now have the same Authority, practice the same Methods, and Disburse, where they cannot otherwise persuade: It seemeth to me to be rather an Evidence than a Presumption of the Deceit.

If there should be Ministers among you, who by having fallen under Temptations of this kind, are in some sort engaged to continue their Frailty, by the awe they are in lest it should be exposed: The perswasions of these unfortunate men must sure have the less force, and their Arguments,

Arguments, though never so specious, are to be suspected, when they come from men who have Mortgaged themselves to severe Creditors that expect a rigorous observation of the Contract, let it be never so unwarrantable.

If these, or any others, should at this time preach up Anger and Vengeance against the Church of *England*; may it not without Injustice be suspected, that a thing so plainly out of season, springeth rather from Corruption than Mistake; and that those who act this Cholerick part, do not believe themselves, but only pursue higher Directions, endeavour to make good that part of their Contract which obligeth them, upon a Forfeiture, to make use of their inflaming Eloquence? They might apprehend their Wages would be retrenched if they should be Moderate: And therefore whilst Violence is their Interest, those who have not the same Arguments, have no reason to follow such a Partial Example.

If there should be men who by the load of their Crimes against the Government, have been bowed down to comply with it against their Conscience; who by incurring the want of a Pardon, have drawn upon themselves the necessity of an intire Resignation: Such men are to be lamented, but not to be believed. Nay, they themselves, when they have discharged their Unwelcome Task, will be inwardly glad that their forced Endeavours do not succeed, and are pleased when men resist their Insinuations; which are far from being Voluntary or Sincere, but are Squeezed out of them by the weight of their being so Obnoxious.

If in the height of this great dearth by comparing things, it should happen, that at this instant, there is much a surer Friendship with those who are so far from allowing Liberty, that they allow no Living to a Protestant under them. Let the Scene lie in what part of the World it will, the Argument will come home, and sure it will afford sufficient ground to suspect. Apparent Contradictions must strike us; neither Nature nor Reason can digest them: Self-Flattery, and the desire to Deceive our selves, to gratifie a present Appetite, with all their Power, which is Great, cannot get the better of such broad Conviction, as some things carry along with them. Will you call these vain and empty Suspicions? have you been at all times so void of Fears and Jealousies as to justify your being so unreasonably Valiant in having none upon this occasion? Such an extraordinary Courage at this unseasonable time, to say no more, is too dangerous a Vertue to be commended.

If then for these and a thousand other Reasons, there is cause to suspect, fire your new Friends are not to Dictate to you, or advise you; for instances, The Addresses that fly abroad every Week; and Murder us with *another to the same*; the first Draughts are made by those who are not very proper to be Secretaries to the Protestant Religion; and it is your part only to Write them out fairer again. Strange! that you who have been formerly so much against *Set Forms*, should now be content the Priests should Indite for you. The nature of Thanks is an unavoidable consequence of
being

being Pleas'd or Oblig'd; they grow in the Heart, and from thence shew themselves either in Looks, Speech, Writing, or Action: No man was ever Thankful because he was bid to be so, but because he had, or thought he had some Reason for it. If then there is cause in this Case to pay such extravagant Acknowledgments, they will flow naturally, without taking such pains to procure them, and it is unkindly done to Tire all the Post-Horses with carrying Circular Letters to solicit that which would be done without any trouble or constraint: If it is really in it self such a Favour, what needeth so much pressing men to be Thankful, and with such eager circumstances, that where Persuasions cannot delude, Threatnings are employ'd to fright them into a Compliance? Thanks must be voluntary, not only unconstrained, but unsolicited, else they are either Trifles or Snares, they either signifie nothing, or a great deal more than is intended by those that give them. If an inference should be made, That whosoever Thanketh the King for his Declaration, is by that engaged to Justifie it in point of Law; it is a greater stride than, I presume, all those care to make who are perswaded to Address: If it shall be supposed, that all the Thankers will be Repealers of the *TEST*, when ever a *Parliament* shall Meet. Such an Expectation is better prevented before, than disappointed afterwards; and the surest way to avoid the lying under such a Scandal, is not to do any thing that may give a colour to the Mistake: These Bespoken Thanks are little less improper than Love Letters that were Solicited by the Lady to whom they are to be Directed: so, that besides the little ground there is to give them, the manner of getting them, doth extremely lessen their Value. It might be wish'd that you would have suppress'd your impatience, and have been content for the sake of Religion, to enjoy it within your selves, without the Liberty of a publick Exercise, till a Parliament had allowed it; but since that could not be, and that the Artifices of some amongst you have made use of the Well-meant Zeal of the Generality to draw them into this Mistake; I am so far from blaming you with that sharpness which, perhaps, the Matter in strictness would bear, that I am ready to err on the side of the more gentle construction.

There is a great difference between enjoying quietly the advantages of an Act irregularly done by others, and the going about to support it against the Laws in being: the Law is so Sacred, that no Trepass against it is to be Defended; yet Frailties may in some measure be Excused, when they cannot be Justified. The desire of enjoying a Liberty from which men have been so long restrained, may be a Temptation that their Reason is not at all times able to resist. If in such a case, some Objections are leapt over, indifferent men will be more inclined to lament the Occasion, than to fall too hard upon the Fault, whilst it is covered with the Apology of a good Intention; but where to rescue your selves from the Severity of one Law, you give a Blow to all the Laws, by which your Religion and Liberty are to be protected;

tested ; and instead of silently receiving the benefit of this Indulgence, you set up for Advocates to support it, you become voluntary Aggressors, and look like Counsel retained by the Prerogative against your old Friend *Magna Charta*, who hath done nothing to deserve her falling thus under your Displeasure.

If the case then should be, that the Price expected from you for this Liberty, is giving up your Right in the Laws, sure you will think twice, before you go any further in such a losing Bargain. After giving Thanks for the breach of one Law, you lose the Right of Complaining of the breach of all the rest ; you will not very well know how to defend your selves, when you are pressed ; and having given up the Question, when it was for your advantage, you cannot recall it, when it shall be to your Prejudice. If you will set up at one time a Power to help you, which at another time by Parity of Reason shall be made use of to destroy you, you will neither be pitied, nor relieved against a Mischief you draw upon your selves, by being so unreasonably thankful. It is like calling in Auxiliaries to help, who are strong enough to subdue you : In such a case your Complaints will come too late to be heard, and your Sufferings will raise Mirth instead of Compassion.

If you think, for your excuse, to expound your Thanks so as to restrain them to this particular case, others, for their ends, will extend them further ; and in these differing Interpretations, that which is back'd by Authority will be the most likely to prevail ; especially when by the advantage you have given them, they have in truth the better of the Argument, and that the Inferences from your own Concessions are very strong, and express against you. This is so far from being a groundless Supposition, that there was a late instance of it, the last Session of Parliament, in the House of Lords, where the first Thanks, though things of course, were interpreted to be the Approbation of the King's whole Speech, and a Restraint from the further Examination of any part of it, though never so much disliked ; and it was with difficulty obtained, not to be excluded from the liberty of objecting to this mighty Prerogative of Dispensing, meerly by this innocent and usual piece of good Manners, by which no such thing could possibly be intended.

This sheweth, that some bounds are to be put to your good Breeding, and that the Constitution of *England* is too valuable a thing to be ventured upon a Complement. Now that you have for some time enjoyed the benefit of the End, it is time for you to look into the Danger of the Means : The same Reason that made you desirous to get Liberty, must make you solicitous to preserve it : so that the next thought will naturally be, not to engage your self beyond Retreat, and to agree so far with the Principles of all Religions, as not to rely upon a Deathbed Repentance.

There are certain Periods of time, which being once past, make all Cautions ineffectual, and all Remedies desperate. Our Understandings are apt to be hurried on by the first heats ; which, if not restrained in time,

do not give us leave to look back, till it is too late. Consider this in the Case of your Anger against the Church of *England*, and take warning by their Mistake in the same kind; when after the late King's Restoration, they preserved so long the bitter taste of your rough usage to them in other times, that it made them forget their Interest, and sacrifice it to their Revenge.

Either you will blame this Proceeding in them, and for that reason not follow it, or if you allow it, you have no reason to be offended with them; so that you must either dismiss your Abger, or lose your Excuse, except you should argue more partially than will be supposed of Men of your Morality and Understanding.

If you had now to do with those Rigid Prelates, who made it a Matter of Conscience to give you the least Indulgence; but kept you at an uncharitable distance, and even to your more reasonable Scruples continued stiff and exorable, the Argument might be fairer on your side; but since the common Danger hath so laid open that Mistake, that all the former Haughtiness towards you is for ever extinguish'd, and that it hath turned the Spirit of Persecution, into a Spirit of Peace, Charity and Condescension; shall this happy Change only affect the Church of *England*? And are you so in love with Separation, as not to be moved by this Example? It ought to be followed; were there no other reason than that it is a Virtue; but when besides that, it is become necessary to your preservation, it is impossible to fail the having its Effect upon you.

If it should be said, that the Church of *England* is never Humble, but when she is out of Power, and therefore loseth the Right of being Believed when she pretendeth to it; the Answer is; *first*, it would be an uncharitable Objection, and very much mis-timed; an unreasonable Triumph, not only ungenerous, but unsafe: So that in these respects it cannot be urged, without Scandal, even though it could be said with Truth. *Secondly*, This is not so in Fact, and the Argument must fall, being built upon a false Foundation; for whatever may be told you, at this very hour, and in the heat and glare of your present Sunshine, the Church of *England* can in a moment bring Clouds again; and turn the Royal Thunder upon your Heads, blow you off the Stage with a Breath, if she would give but a Smile or a kind Word; the least Glimpse of her Compliance, would throw you back into the state of Suffering, and draw upon you all the Attacks of Severity, which have accrued during the time of this kindness to you, and yet the Church

of *England*, with all her Faults, will not allow her self to be rescued by such unjustifiable means, but chuse to bear the weight of Power, rather than lie under the burthen of being Criminal.

It cannot be said, that she is unprovoked; Books and Letters come out every day, to call for Answers, yet she will not be stirred. From the supposed Authors and the Style one would swear they were Undertakers, and had made a Contract to fall out with the *Church of England*. There are Lashes in every Address, Challenges to draw the Pen in every Pamphlet; in short, the fairest occasions in the World given to quarrel; but she wisely distinguisheth between the Body of Dissenters, whom she will suppose to Act, as they do, with no ill intent; and these small Skirmishers pickt and sent out to Picquet, and to begin a Fray amongst the Protestants, for the entertainment, as well as the advantage of the *Church of Rome*.

This Conduct is so good, that it will be scandalous not to Applaud it. It is not equal dealing, to blame our Adversaries for doing ill, and not commend them when they do well.

To hate them because they Persecuted, and not to be reconciled to them when they are ready to Suffer, rather than receive all the Advantages that can be gained by a Criminal Compliance, is a Principle no sort of Christians can own, since it would give an Objection to them never to be Answered.

Think a little, who they were that promoted your former Persecutions, and then consider how it will look to be angry with the Instruments, and at the same time to make a League with the Authors of your Sufferings.

Have you enough considered what will be expected from you? Are you ready to stand in every Borough by a Virtue of a *Conjuration*, and instead of Election be finished if you are returned?

Will you in *Parliament*, justify the Dispensing Power, with all its consequences; and repeal the *Test*, by which you will make way for the Repeal of all the Laws, that were made to preserve your Religion; and to limit others that shall destroy it?

Are you disposed to change the Liberty of Debate, into the Merit of Obedience, and to be made Instruments to Repeal or Enact Laws, when the *Roman Consistory* are Lords of the *Articles*?

Are you so linked with your new Friends, as to reject any Indulgence a *Parliament* shall offer you, if it shall not be so Comprehensive as to include the *Papists* in it?

Consider that the implied Conditions of your new Treaty are no less, than that you are to do every thing you are desired, with-

out examining, and that for this pretended Liberty of Conscience, your real Freedom is to be Sacrificed: Your former Faults hang like Chains still about you, you are let loose only upon Bayl; the first Act of Non-compliance, sendeth you to jail again.

You may see that the Papists themselves, do not rely upon the Legality of this Power, which you are to Justify, since they being so very earnest to get it Established by a Law, and the doing such very hard things in order, as they think to obtain it, is a clear Evidence, that they do not think, that the single Power of the Crown is in this Case a good Foundation; especially when this is done under a Prince, so very tender of all the Rights of Sovereignty, that he would think it a diminution to his Prerogative, where he conceiveth it strong enough to go alone, to call in the Legislative help to strengthen and support it.

You have formerly blamed the Church of England, and not without reason, for going so far as they did in their Compliance; and yet as soon as they stopped, you see they are not only Deserted, but Prosecuted: Conclude then from this Example, that you must either break off your Friendship, or resolve to have no Bounds in it. If they do not succeed in their Design, they will leave you first; if they do, you must either leave them, when it will be too late for your Safety, or else after the squeezing of starting at a Surplice, you must be forced to swallow Transubstantiation.

Remember that the other day those of the Church of England were *Trimmers* for enduring you, and now by a sudden Turn, you are become the Favourites; do not deceive your selves, it is not the Nature of lasting Plants thus to shoot up in a Night; you may look gay and green for a little time, but you want a Root to give you a continuance. It is not so long since, as to be forgotten, that the *Maxim* was, *It is impossible for a Dissenter, not to be a REBEL*. Consider at this time in France, even the new Converts are so far from being Employed, that they are Disarmed: their sudden Change maketh them still to be distrusted, notwithstanding that they are Reconciled: What are you to expect then from your dear Friends, to whom, whenever they shall think fit to throw you off again, you have in other times given such Arguments for their excuse?

Besides all this, you Act very unskillfully against your visible Interest, if you throw away the advantages of which you can hardly fail in the next probable Revolution. Things tends naturally to what you would have, if you would let them alone, and

net by an unseasonable Activity lose the Influences of your good Star, which promiseth you every thing that is prosperous.

The *Church of England* convinced of its Errour in being Severe to you; the *Parliament*, when ever it meeteth, sure to be Gentle to you; the next Heir bred in the Country which you have so often Quoted for a Pattern of Indulgence; a general Agreement of all thinking Men, that we must no more cut our selves off from the Protestants abroad, but rather enlarge the Foundations upon which we are to build our Defences against the Common Enemy; so that in Truth, all things seem to conspire to give you ease and satisfaction, if by too much hast to anticipate your good Fortune, you do not destroy it.

The Protestants have but one Article of Human Strength, to oppose the the Power which is now against them, and that is, not to lose the advantage of their numbers, by being so unwary as to let themselves be divided.

We all agree in our Duty to our Prince, our Objections to his Belief, do not hinder us from seeing his Vertues; and our not complying with his Religion, hath no effect upon our Allegiance; we are not to be Laughed out of our Passive Obedience, and the Doctrine of Non-Resistance, though even those who perhaps owe the best part of their Security to that Principle, are apt to make a Jest of it.

So that if we give no advantage by the fatal Mistake of misapplying our Anger, by the natural course of things, this Danger will pass away like a shower of Hail; fair weather will succeed, as lowering as the Sky now looketh, and all by this plain and easie Receipt. Let us be still, quiet and undivided, firm at the same time to our Religion, our Loyalty, and our Laws, and so long as we continue this method, it is next to impossible, that the odds of two hundred to one should lose the Bet; except the Church of *Rome*, which hath been so long barren of Miracles, should now in her declining Age, be brought to Bed of One that would out-do the best she can brag of in her Legend.

To conclude, the short Question will be, Whether you will joyn with those who must in the end run the same Fate with you. If Protestants of all sorts, in their Behaviour to one another, have been to blame, they are upon the more equal terms, and for that very reason it is fitter for them now to be reconciled. Our Dis-union is not only a Reproach, but a Danger to us; those who believe in modera Miracles, have more Right, or at least more Excuse, to neglect all Secular Cautions; but for us, it is as justifiable to have no Religion, as wilfully to throw away the Human Means of preserving it. I am,

Dear SIR,

Your most Affectionate
Humble Servant,

T. W.